

shout your lungs out at me

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by [lightning_anon](#)

Summary

Phil Watson is painfully used to being yelled at. There's a reason he refuses to ever yell at one of his own kids. Phil Watson is painfully used to bad parents. There's a reason he's committed to being the best parent he can be.

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Phil's encompass installment: a look at past, present, and future and the influences they have.

either side of me

Chapter Summary

Phil and his family, the beginning of three generations.

Chapter Notes

CW: alcoholism, drunkenness, hangovers, bad parenting, borderline abusive parents, needles, antivax rhetoric, ableism, queerphobia, f slur, manipulation of a child

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Phillip Watson had never gone by anything but Phillip. Or at least not until the second grade.

The first day of second grade his teacher calls out the name 'Phil,' looking for an answer. Phillip, never having gone by the name and having no connection to it, does not answer.

"Phil," she calls again, "Phillip Watson?"

"Oh, that's me," Phillip perks up.

"Oh, do you go by Phillip?" the teacher asks.

Phillip thinks about it, reflects on his name. He hears it often. It's his favorite word for his parents to yell.

"No, Phil's fine," he says. And so Phil he is. Or, Phil he is everywhere but at home.

"Phillip," screams his mom, "dishwasher! Now!"

But that's okay, he thinks, he can be Phillip at home. As long as he doesn't have to be Phillip anywhere else.

"Phillip Watson?" the stranger at the door asks.

"Yes," he says, offering out a hand, "but please, it's just Phil."

"Jordan," he said, "nice to meet you Phil. Let's get a look at that house- yeah?"

It's the first of many, many inspections.

"So," Jordan asks him later, seated at Phil's kitchen table, "I wanted to go through a few basic things with you. All the technical stuff is out of the way. But the parenting is just as- if not more important- when fostering. Mind if I ask you a few questions?"

"Of course," Phil says, trying to ignore the way his palms start to shake and sweat more than a little. It's not like he can say no to mandatory interviewing.

"Alright," Jordan says, "what would you do if a kid you were fostering broke the rules?"

Phil's thought about this, thought about rules and discipline. He's read parenting books and foster blogs. He has an answer ready for this. But he looks at Jordan and throws all of that out the window.

"I would never, ever, yell," he tells him instinctively.

"Oh?" Jordan asks, "tell me about that?"

"Phillip!" his father shouts when he enters the house, "what the fuck did you do to your pants?"

Phil- who was bright eyed just a minute ago, immediately looks down at his muddy trousers.

"We- uh we had PE?" Phil offers. He keeps his head down, shoulders drawn. He knows his father would never hurt him. But sometimes, the bark really is worse than the bite.

"You couldn't have kept a bit cleaner?" his mom huffs.

"It was a messy game and it just rained yesterday!" Phil protests. He had tried. He didn't really want to be in school all day with muddy clothes either. But the mud was hard to avoid!

"Phillip!" His father snaps, "don't talk back to your mother."

The harsh tone has Phil wilting.

"Sorry," he mumbles, suspiciously close to tears.

His father scoffs.

"Chin up boy, we don't raise queers in this household. Apologize like a man."

Phil raises his head, and turns to his mother, doing his best not to tremble.

"I'm sorry," he says, "It won't happen again."

"Make sure that it doesn't," his mother huffs.

Techno comes home with muddy pants and before he can escape to his room, Phil catches him with the call of his name.

"Yeah?" Techno asks.

"What'd you do with your pants?" Phil asks. He's never seen Techno come home from school so grimy. In general Techno's never been very messy. Disorganized, sure, but never messy. A lot of messy things have bad textures to him, so it's an odd sight to see him covered in dirt.

But Techno perks up immediately at the question, much to Phil's surprise.

"I caught a frog!" he announces.

Phil laughs, the words not quite sinking in at first, caught up in the silliness of the statement and Techno's obvious excitement. But then he notices how Techno's hands are gently grasped together.

He instantly pales.

"Maybe let's let our little frog friend go back outside?" Phil suggests, "it's not very nice to take things from their homes."

Techno stands there for a minute. Phil doesn't push him. It's a big readjustment to what Techno's planned- which Phil assumes was keeping the frog... somewhere? Somehow. Phil withholds himself from making a comment, urging Techno onto action. Techno might take some time to process Phil's request. That's okay..

Patience, Phil reminds himself. Patience.

"No," Techno agrees, "it's not very nice to take things from their homes."

Techno's eyes are misty.

Oh. Oh no.

"But, but sometimes," Techno continues, "they- well they don't really have a choice. Sometimes it has to happen, even if it's really really hard."

Phil exhales. When did Techno get so smart and how the hell did he miss it?

Or that's a total lie, Techno's always been bright. Intellectual Techno is leagues ahead. Socially... Techno's behind, probably always will be. But that's okay because society's perspective of social intelligence is ableist and outdated anyway- something Techno taught Phil himself. Techno deserves to have his needs met and not be expected to be allistic, or even blend in properly with an allistic society.

Emotionally is an entirely different story. When it comes to theory, Techno's a whiz with emotional intelligence. When it comes to himself or others, Techno's always struggled.

And here he is, growing and processing in his own way. Phil is so proud.

"But," Techno continues, "The frog... I can give the frog a choice."

"You can," Phil agrees, "The frog has a choice."

Techno looks to his eyebrows, snuffles one last time, and together they shuffle to the nearby pond, low ribbits coming from Techno's hands periodically.

"It's not your choice!" Phil's dad snaps.

"But dad," Phil complains.

His dad shoots him a look, and he shuts up.

Phillip's a bit nervous to enter the building. It's half past noon on a weekday, and he has a cold, so he's not at school. His dad didn't want to leave him home alone, so he took him with him.

But something tells Phil that he's not supposed to be here.

When he follows his dad through the doors, heads all turn in his direction. There's not many of them, but every pair of eyes is on him. He shuffles closer to his father.

"He can't be here," someone at the counter says.

"C'mon John, it's my day off. The kid's sick. We'll be out of here before it gets busy."

Phil snuffles behind his father, and the person's face at the counter crumples.

"Okay," he says, "but you better not let him drink."

"Course not," his dad says.

They take their seats, Phil sitting on the very edge and trying to ignore how the few other adults in the room all stare.

He sinks in to himself, coughing quietly into his elbow but otherwise staying quiet.

He stays there, just sitting, for a few hours. His father sips on drinks Phil doesn't know the name of.

He knows it's alcohol, and he knows they're not beer because that comes in cans and bottles, but he doesn't know anything beyond that.

His cough gets worse and at one point his father passes over a sour tasting cough drop to him along with a glass of water. He gets hungry, and his father provides him with pretzels.

And then, hours later, they go home.

"We're running a bit late, but we should still beat your mom home. Remember, this was a boy's afternoon, yeah? She doesn't need to know."

Phil nods and presses his head against the glass window of the car. His head hurts.

"Where the fuck have you been," Phil's mom snaps the minute they walk through the door.

Phil's father cringes. He gently pushes Phil forward, between him and his wife.

"Were you drinking/!" His mom demands as if the answer wasn't obvious. "And you brought Phillip?"

"You said not to leave him home alone," his dad protests.

"That doesn't mean you should take him to the bar! Jesus Christ you couldn't go without a fucking beer for one day?"

"Oh that's rich coming from you," Phil's dad snaps right back.

Phillip shrinks between them too.

"Phillip," his mom says, turning to him. "Go to your room."

"But-"

"Now!" she snaps.

Phil scurries off. His parents continue to yell, screaming each other out. Even from his room Phil can hear how loudly they argue.

"Fuck you," Wil shouts, "you're not my fucking dad you don't get to tell me what to do!"

Phil takes a step back, startled from the sudden outburst. He grits his teeth, ready to find Wil that he is his legal guardian and it is his responsibility to take care of him. That Phil gets to make the rules in the house. Wil's a kid, it's his job to listen.

But before he can respond, Phil catches sight of Techno in the doorway.

He's not wearing shoes, just socks on the hard floor. His headphones are over his head, and he has the added bonus of holding them firmly over his ears, pressing in. He looks at the floor, but he's very obviously paying attention to Wil and Phil.

Phil takes a deep breath.

"Okay," he says to Wil, "I hear you."

He watches every step in his voice, making sure to keep it even, not to raise it, even slightly. He'd rather whisper and go unheard than shout and scream.

"I don't have to be your dad if that's not what you want, but I am your guardian right now. I can't force you to listen. If you disagree about something I put into place- a rule, anything- tell me. Let me know. We can discuss it and see if we can modify it so it best fits you, okay?"

Wil gapes at him.

"But," Phil continues, "we're not going to get anywhere with yelling. Do you think we can have a talk instead?"

Wil stares at him for another moment, and then nods. Phil watches Techno slowly lift his head from his headphones in the corner of his eye.

Progress.

"Mom, am I ever going to have a little brother or sister?" A young Phil asks one day.

His mom looks down at him as she folds the fresh clothes from the dryer.

She scoffs.

"No," she says.

"Why not?" Phil asks.

"Your father and I hadn't really talked much about having kids," she tells him, "you were a surprise. And you're plenty enough."

Phil points, disappointed. His friend had just gotten a little sister and he'd really love one to play with too.

"But I could have a friend," he insists

"And we'd have another mouth to feed" his mom snaps back.

Phil shrinks away and dunks his head. He shouldn't have pushed. He should know better by now.

His mom sighs.

She reaches it and strokes his hair, kneeling down to his level.

"I'm sorry," she says, "I didn't mean that. You're a great kid Philip, and you're so great that we don't need any other kids but you, okay? I love you."

"I love you too," Phil responds reflexively.

He hugs his mom, and she hugs him back.

When Phil first considers adopting, he takes his time deciding if it's what he wants to do. If he goes through this, kids will rely on him. It'll be his responsibility to care for them and love them, to give them a safe home and environment where he can support them and help them grow.

Phil knows he wants to do it. He wants to with all his heart.

But it isn't an easy decision. There's a lot to think about.

Watching Tommy now, he's so glad he said yes. He's been glad he said yes with all of his boys or course, but Tommy's case has him reflecting on this particularly.

Techno- Phil doesn't know. Techno could have found a good placement. Phil loves him, loves having him here, wants him here.

And if Techno hadn't found Phil, he may have even gone back to his mom. Phil doesn't know if that necessarily would have been bad.

The thing is, techno had other options. Phil is confident he would have been okay.

Wilbur is a different story, like Tommy he pushed families away but Wil was just so damn easy to love. He never lashes out at foster family's to the extreme, just at himself.

Another family could have helped him, Phil knows that. There are other families out there that would have worked with Wil, would have helped him.

Wilbur could have found a family elsewhere.

But Tommy, Tommy. God is Tommy good at getting people to hate him. Phil hasn't seen anything like it before.

It's easy hating someone when that's all you know. It's harder hating someone you once loved.

And Phil loves Tommy, loves him so much. But he sees the kid hurt his kids. He sees Tommy push Techno into a meltdown, steal Wilbur's meds, and manipulate them all.

Some part of Phil hates Tommy, hates that he could do that to his kids, do that to him.

He knows why Tommy did it, but that doesn't make it hurt any less.

Phil is a big enough man to admit that he did consider sending Tommy away. It would have been easier, surely.

But, Phil couldn't. He couldn't do that.

Because Tommy is as much his kid as Wilbur, as Techno, and he could never give up on one of kids. Ever.

So Tommy stays. And Phil's never been so proud of any of his kids before.

They've made mistakes, but that's part of life and growth and moving forward. Phil's made plenty of mistakes in his life.

For example, the first time Phil got blackout drunk, he was seventeen years old and at a friend of a friend's party.

That isn't to say it was Phil's first time drinking, just the first time he had genuinely been drunk.

His first sip of alcohol has been as a young kid when he grabbed his mom's glass instead of his. Until he was fifteen, he hadn't touched another drop. But on his fifteenth birthday, his dad

had passed him a beer and congratulated him on becoming a man. He's had a few drinks since.

But having a few drinks is different then being drunk which is different then waking up in an unfamiliar room with a pounding head and a distinct lack of memory of any of the night's previous events.

Where even is he?

He blinks, shifting slightly and sitting up. Immediately he feels the urge to puke, and just barely avoids retching all over the floor. The floor? Apparently he slept on the floor.

He looks around, spotting a few other people scattered around the room, and stumbles to his feet. With a ghostly white face, he grabs his bag and stumbles for his door. Hopefully his phone has enough battery to figure out the bus system, it's too far to walk and it's not like he can ask his parents to pick him up.

God his parents.

If possible, Phil's face pales even further.

Phil's not sure why, they won't be mad, Phil knows they won't. They probably didn't even realize he was gone. It's just... well...

"Are you hungover?" his dad asks, when he finally gets home.

"Philip?" his mother says, coming over to inspect the commotion.

Phil tries to duck out, heading up to his room.

His father barks out a laugh behind him.

"Hey no need to be ashamed," his dad calls after him, "Like father, like son, right?"

Phil has never felt more dread in his life than in the moment. He swears to never drink again.

Phil doesn't know which of his kids are most like him. They don't have the blood relation, obviously. But Phil has raised them, has helped guide them through formative years and there's parts of him that have rubbed off onto each of them. Techno- the way Techno turns his head slightly when he listens is a clear reflection of his own. Wilbur's smirk, Tommy's swearing, his kids have all picked up his habits.

Phil thinks they're most exemplified in Ranboo. Ironic considering he had him the shortest amount of time.

It's just, well Ranboo breathes like he does.

It's- look- maybe it's silly but Phil's always done this thing? Almost like a double breath. An inhale, then a deeper inhale, then hold, then exhale. Really, it's hardly noticeable. It's a slight uneven beat in his breath and...

And Ranboo does the same thing.

He hates to see Ranboo struggling to do that now.

“In,” Phil says gently, “Hold. Out. You're okay. It's going to be okay.”

It takes a half hour for Ranboo's breathing to even, and even so he's still shaky and uncertain.

Phil smooths his hair, and holds him as long as he needs. He'll let Ranboo break the silence when he needs to.

“Do you- Do you ever fear turning into your parents?” Ranboo asks.

Phil sucks in a breath. That little double inhale. Ranboo does the same.

“Yes,” he says, “and no. Depends on the day.”

Ranboo nods.

“It's one of my yes days,” he says.

Phil doesn't really know how to reassure him, because in complete honesty he still struggles to reassure himself in moments like these. Instead he holds Ranboo close and they breathe together.

The hardest thing about Phil's parents dying is how easy it all is. One day they're there, the next they're not, and once he's gotten through the funeral and the wills Phil is... Phil is happy. He's okay.

At first he wonders if he's doing that thing- that thing when people die and you act like you're okay and then you crack and break and end up crying because you forgot your keys or something small.

But that never happens to Phil. He feels fine, great even.

In fact, the only real bad feelings he has is the guilt of not feeling worse.

It had been a pretty awful death after all, drunk driving accidents can be that way.

Phil wasn't surprised when he heard. He's just grateful that didn't take anyone else with them. The only thing he wonders of is if it had been an accident, suicide, or murder. None would surprise him.

Eventually the guilt keeps eating away, and away, and away. He stops assisting at the local community college classes, and only one professor notices. She's sympathetic, and directs him towards counselling.

Phil argues, telling her that's the problem, he should need counselling but he doesn't, he's fine. She tells him to go anyway.

That's how he meets Sam.

"Let's talk about your parents," Sam says, and that's how it starts.

They go over Phil's basic history for a bit, before going anywhere deep. To be honest, Phil doesn't really remember all of his sessions during that time, the seven months blurring together in places. It was so long ago anyway.

What he does remember is Sam asking him quite clearly on his first session what his parents were like.

"They were bad parents," Phil says instantly, instinctively, "but they loved me."

Sam nods, writes a note, but doesn't argue.

"Sometimes that's not enough," he points out.

In that moment Phil knows he either made the worst or best decision in his life.

"Yeah, I guess it isn't always, is it," he says.

Sam nods.

"Tell me about that."

In third grade, Phil's class was going to the zoo for a field trip. The entire class had been talking about it for two weeks, and now the night before Phil could hardly sleep.

He woke bright and early the next day, determined not to miss it. He was most excited to see the elephants. Or, no! The tigers!

It was going to be so fun.

Was.

Phil grabs his backpack and the folder with his permission slip on the counter and races to catch his bus.

When he gets to school and slides into his desk, he passes his form forwards, barely glancing at it as he chats with his neighbors about everything they're going to see. Eventually, the teacher calls them all together, and then she pulls Phil aside.

"I'm going to take you to the library now, sound good?" she says, "Or did you want to go to another class for the day?"

"What?" Phil says, "But what about the zoo?"

She frowns at him.

"Your permission slip wasn't signed."

“What?” Phil says again, “Yes it was. I turned it in!”

The teacher walks back over to her desk, flipping through some papers. She pulls one out and comes back over, holding it out to Phil.

His eyes immediately go to the blank ‘parent signature’ line.

Phil’s face falls. He had done everything. He had even written in his mother’s name! He set it in on the counter, just like she said, in the red folder for school signatures. He told her, and he reminded her and she had- she had promised!

But the paper wasn’t signed.

“Oh,” Phil says, sniffing.

“Oh honey,” the teacher said, realizing there’s been some miscommunication and Phil fully believed he was going on this trip. “It’s okay. You’ll have a great day at the library! Maybe you can find a book about animals.”

“Yeah,” Phil says, “Sure.” A book? A book about animals?

Phil’s read tons of animal books. He was excited to see the real thing.

“Whatever,” he says, and lets the teacher lead him off to the library. He starts signing his own school papers after that. His mom never finds out. Or maybe she does- maybe she just doesn’t care.

Phil doesn’t really know.

And he doesn’t really know what he should tell Tommy, Tubbo, and Ranboo.

“Please,” Tommy begs, “We’ll be good.”

Ranboo nods enthusiastically at his side.

“We’ll be safe,” Tubbo promises, “We’re not gonna drink or anything, we’re not stupid.”

Still, Phil hesitates.

“It’s a high school party,” he notes. That says enough in his point of view.

Tommy nods.

“Yeah,” he agrees, “and we’re in high school!”

Phil doesn’t know.

“C’mon,” Tommy whines.

The kids want to go, they’re actually excited and- well they’re good kids, aren’t they? Phil can trust them. So...

“No,” he says, “I’m sorry, but no.”

Tommy’s smile instantly drops.

“No?” he asks as if it's a new word to him.

“No,” Phil agrees, he looks at all three of them. “I don't want you going.”

The three of them stare at him dumbfounded. Phil’s waiting for the challenge he knows is going to occur. The question is if it’ll be from Tubbo or Tommy, because it certainly won’t be Ranboo.

“It’s just a partry,” Tubbo protest, “And we’re not going to be stupid.”

“I know,” Phil says, “I trust you three to be safe and responsible.”

Another silence.

“Then uh- well then why can’t we go?” Ranboo asks.

Phil blinks.

“Regardless of how much I trust you three, I’m not letting you go to a high school party that I know nothing about. Especially knowing highschoolers. While I trust you to behave, I don’t trust any of these kids I’ve never met nor heard of. I think it's an unsafe position for you three to be in.

They continue to stare.

Phil waits for whatever is to come.

“Okay,” Tommy says. The other two nod in agreement.

And well, that is a bit of a surprise to Phil. He thought Tommy might be the most pushy on the matter.

“Can we at least still go out? Not to the party- but I dunno. The pier or something.”

“Sure,” Phil says. And he recognizes a compromise when he sees one, “And if you text me when you get there, and when you’re headed out, you can have an extra hour on your curfew.

The three of them instantly light up.

“Really?” Tubbo asks.

Phil nods and the three of them scuttle off.

Sometimes no can be an answer. And sometimes it can be the right one.

It’s something Phil had to learn after years of living with frustrating ‘no’s’ he got from his parents. He’s used to being frustrated with his parents. Like when he was fifteen-

He has a fifteen year old kid sobbing in his arms and look, Phil's been here before but this is a new kid and he has no idea what to do. So he does his best to hold Wilbur, lets him fall apart in his arms as Phil struggles to keep them both afloat.

"I want to die," Wilbur sobs. And then again, with a scream, "I want to die."

Oh.

And if that doesn't just break Phil's heart right then and there.

When Phil is fifteen he tells his parents that he wants to die

His father scoffs, his mom laughs.

"Honey," she says, "Don't be so dramatic."

Phil slams his mouth closed and his breath catches.

"Right," he says, and fuck why are his eyes watering.

His dad catches the tears in his eyes.

"Don't be a sissy," he scoffs, "Don't tell me my son's gay. Only faggots cry."

Phil inhales, exhales, erases the tears.

"No," he says, "I'm not crying."

"Good."

He never brings up his passive suicidal ideation again. Looking back on it, he's lucky those thoughts weren't active. He's lucky he grew out of it.

Can you grow out of being suicidal?

"It's just," Phil says, "My parents weren't all bad, y'know? My mom baked cookies on the weekend and they took me to my favorite cafe on my birthday and they always made sure we had the tea I liked. They weren't- they weren't all bad. They certainly weren't abusive."

Sam listens and nods.

"I guess it's just- I feel like I owe them something, y'know? I never really felt like a kid, they depended on me too much. And they made fun of me a lot and my dad- my dad always used to say he 'didn't raise a queer' and... and good parents don't do that, do they."

"And well, are you?"

"Am I what?"

"Queer."

"I'm not gay," Phil says immediately, because he knows he's not.

"Okay. Are you queer?"

Phil was nineteen when he first kisses a boy. Ironic really that the straight kid's first kiss is with someone of the same sex.

But welll, his parents aren't around and his dad can't call him a fucking faggot so why the fuck not. And dammit, his friend had been curious and Phil was supportive.

They pulled apart. Phil was left a bit stunned, but with zero enjoyment.

"Woah," his friend says.

Phil nods.

"So I'm gay," his friend says.

"I'm not," replies Phil.

That's that.

It takes another six months for Phil to kiss his first girl and... and well it feels the same as kissing his friend months ago.

Phil feels nothing.

He laughs.

"I mean he's and no," he hedges, "I'm queer as in I don't like girls, but I don't like anyone else either. So I don't know if that really counts. I don't know if that's queer enough."

"I don't think that's how it works," Sam says, not unkind. "I don't think there's a way to measure queerness as 'enough.'"

Phil raises his eyes.

"And you would know..."

"I'm queer," Sam says, "Aromantic asexual actually. Heard of that before?"

Phil shakes his head. He hasn't.

"Let me tell you about them," Sam says gently. And he teaches Phil a whole new dictionary of words. An entire new dictionary that- well, some of the words maybe do seem to make sense. They all make sense, all identities are valid. But some... some click.

Aro. Ace.

Is that queer enough?

"Wilbur," he says softly three weeks after his son had told him he was pregnant, "can I ask you a personal question?"

Wilbur smiles at him easily, with familiarity. Phil hopes he isn't about to break that.

"Yeah, 'course," he says.

Phil hesitates.

It's- well he doesn't mean to hesitate. But it's personal and he doesn't want to make Wil feel uncomfortable in his own home and-

"Dad," Wil says, "what is it?"

"I-" Phil hesitates once more, and then goes for it.

"You identify as trans as well as intersex," Phil asks, "how- why- how does that work."

Wilbur freezes and oh gosh this is exactly why Phil didn't want to ask these questions, didn't want to put his child in this position.

"I thought-" Wilbur stumbles, "I- we've talked about this," his voice chokes up, "Why..."

It's then Phil realizes where he went wrong.

"Oh, no no no," he soothes instantly, "this isn't me questioning your identity. I know..." Phil takes a breath, repeats with more conviction, pours all his love for Wilbur into his words.

"I know you're trans," he says, "I know you're intersex. I understand that your experience with gender is so intertwined with you being intersex. That's- I'm not trying to question that," Phil says. "I- I will never question that. I understand it, I validate it, I celebrate it. Your gender and how you experience it is celebrated here Wilbur. Always."

But is Phil celebrated?

Does he even have something to be celebrated for?

"Oh, okay," Wilbur says. But he still frowns. Phil knows it's a different type of frowning. It's Wilbur's turn to have a question. The problem is, Phil can't quite tell if his question is 'why are you asking' or 'what are you asking.'

"I- Phil says, "it's less... less of identity and more of... understanding identity. How did- how did you know that's what felt right for you?"

Wilbur's entire face softens instantly and there's a look, there's a glint in his eye Phil doesn't recognize. It's- it feels welcoming.

"Oh," Wilbur says, "oh yeah- yeah we can talk about that."

They spend the next two hours curled up in the living room couch, holding each other close over whispered comments of identity and understanding.

Aro. Ace.

Maybe Phil never really was alone. Maybe being aro ace doesn't mean he is alone, will be alone.

Suddenly it's a lot less isolating.

Turns out, Wilbur has a great fear of needles. A great, horrible, panic inducing fear of needles.

And turns out Wilbur's been stabbing himself alone for weeks now, ever since he came to live with them.

Phil finds him in the bathroom, hands shaking as he sits on the closed toilet seat.

"What are you doing?" he asks, crouching to Wilbur's level.

Wilbur heaves in a breath.

"Trying to do my t shot?" He says. And that's when it clicks.

"You're scared of needles," Phil realizes.

Wilbur breathes out a shaky laugh.

"No," he jokes, "what gave that away?"

Phil makes a few calls, jumps through a few hoops, and gets Wil another appointment.

He requests to come with, explains that he'll leave when Wil actually wants to talk about his medical shit if Wil doesn't want him there for it.

The first thing he asks is how to give a t shot. Wilbur gives him a stunned look.

The doctor smiles, and nods, saying how nice it is to have parents supporting their children.

Wilbur doesn't even correct her.

From then on, Phil gives Wilbur his shots.

Phil's parents were anti-vax. Or really his mom was.

She was certain in her stance that there was significant evidence that vaccines caused autism, and anyways it was better to toughen up his immune system naturally.

Better a dead child than an autistic child, right?

Phil wouldn't realize how morbid, how ableist, that ideology was until he would take Techno on as his first foster.

But no immunizations growing up meant that Phil spent a lot of time sick. Which meant he spent a lot of time playing games.

"I still don't understand how you're so good at this," Tommy complains, crashing into the side of Phil's kart in Mario Kart and still failing to do any harm.

Phil laughs and pulls just that little bit ahead to finish in first place.

Tommy grumbles and throws down his controller.

"How's an old man better at a video game than me?" he complains.

Phil cackles.

Tommy narrows his eyes at him.

"Again," his youngest insists, picking his remote back up. Phil all too happily complies. He's absolutely down to kick Tommy's butt at another round.

He does. Tommy scowls further and just for the hell of it, Phil chooses Rainbow Road as the next run. Tommy looks at him in abject terror.

"Please tell me you're not good at this map," he whispers and Phil let's out another cackle.

Truth be told, he's not very good at Rainbow Road, doesn't have it memorized well enough, but it's intimidating and that's what he was hoping for.

Tommy scowls one final time and gets this determined look on his face before leaning forward.

"I'm going to beat you," he swears.

"Phillip I'm going to beat your ass if you don't get down here right this minute!" His mom shouts and Phil freezes. Icy hot water drenches his lungs and he struggles to breath. What did he do this time?

"I- I loved- love? my parents," Phil admits, "but I also... I spent a lot of time scared of them."

Sam nods.

"I can see why that would be."

Phil turns his head slightly.

"What do you mean?" he asks.

"Well why do you think that is for you?" Sam asks.

"I- they did nice things for me," Phil says, "they did nice things with me. My mom got me my favorite books and she remembered what games I liked best. My dad knew to order a hamburger without tomato for me and he's the one who taught me how to make a fire. I love them. They're- I have fond memories with them. Good ones. Happy ones."

Sam nods. Phil hesitates.

"And I also have bad ones," he admits, "I- I don't think I ever really thought my parents would hurt me. Maybe... maybe scared isn't the right word. I was safe. I knew I was safe. I never... I never felt unsafe."

"What did you feel?" Sam asks.

Phil looks up, meeting him in the eyes.

"Apprehensive."

Chapter End Notes

I'm back and will reply to comments I haven't yet shortly. Hope you enjoyed this first little bit.

Also I still don't have working internet in my new place, so I'm posting this on my phone lmao.

Fixed the double post thing. Fuck mobile.

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

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between moments

Chapter Summary

Phil's past reflects his present reflects his future. He promises to do differently then his parents

Chapter Notes

CW: excessive drinking, alcholism, underage drinking, breaking a bone, neglect, excusing/jutifying bad behavior, internal aro/acephobia, ableism, dangerous activities, kids being stupid and getting hurt

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Taking in Ranboo wasn't the plan. Phil doesn't regret it, could never regret it. He doesn't regret Ranboo one bit.

What Phil does regret is his own failures in planning for Ranboo's arrival.

To be fair, he had very little warning and he had three other kids- one who he was still fully responsible for- to balance.

But still.

Phil felt like he wasn't prepared enough.

He didn't know Ranboo. Wilbur and Tommy he had prepared for. The last time he had a wild card like this was Techno- but at least with Techno they had both been new together. Plus, that never was intended to be a permanent placement.

Ranboo was different.

Phil had taken him in knowing that the hope would be to have him stay here indefinitely. In addition, Ranboo was the only new one. Phil's done this three times before.

He should have a handle on this.

More than often he feels like he doesn't.

He's worried, on edge, apprehensive. Just a few weeks into Ranboo's stay and the entire house feels like it's hanging on by a thread and Phil has no idea how or when it unraveled so

fast.

He didn't even notice anything was wrong until Tommy came home from school one day and didn't even hesitate before heading straight to his room.

He hadn't done that- well he hadn't done that in a while.

Tommy only went straight to his room when he was really upset, upset enough that he was too scared to talk to Phil about it. That hadn't been the case in quite a bit.

Usually Tommy was all energy when getting home from school. Secondary school never was made to accommodate neurodivergent kids and Tommy had an excess of energy already without school's expectations for him to show zero traits of his ADHD.

It wasn't a surprise that Tommy was a motormouth after school, bouncing, vibrating, stimming like crazy as he recalled his day and talked about whatever came to his mind.

Phil loves to see. Phil loves to see Tommy comfortable in his own home.

But Tommy- Tommy went straight to his room.

Sure it may be a small thing, but it feels like more, and Phil feels like he's failing as a parent.

"Tommy," he calls softly, knocking on the door and hoping for the best.

"Yeah," Tommy calls, "I'm kinda busy. Is it important?"

Phil hesitates. He doesn't want to intrude in Tommy's space.

"I guess not," Phil says, and then, "I love you."

"Okay bye."

It shouldn't hurt as much as it does. Tommy still doesn't say I love you all that often. Phil knows it's not a fault of his, but a result of Tommy's trauma.

He tries not to take it personally. He does.

He'd much rather Tommy say I love you authentically than be forced into the words.

"What do you say?" His mom presses.

"I love you," Phil says around grit teeth as his dad waits to pull out of the driveway.

It's forced. They all know it's forced, but it's also what their little family is used to, it's just the way it's been. The way it's always been.

That's not to say Phil doesn't love his parents. In fact, he does. Dearly and deeply.

How could he not? They raised him and took him out for nice birthday dinners. They came to his school play when he was eleven and even gave him a bouquet of flowers for his hard

work. He'd only been in the ensemble, but they still celebrated his performance with pride.

Phil loves them, he does.

But he also hates them sometimes. And he hates the way his parents expect him to love them.

Because they've also hurt him, and they refuse to see it.

Phil's been hurt by his kids before, but that doesn't make it hurt any less each time it happens.

"I hate you," Techno screams, and the words send Phil stumbling back a few steps. His kids have said it before, but rarely does it hold this much weight, this much truth behind it.

"You're just doing this to hurt me. You don't understand."

They had been talking just a minute ago. The car ride back from the bus had been silent, and they had begun the conversation in the kitchen. It had started slow, Phil gently asking why he had done it, what his intent had been and suddenly- before he knew it- Techno's screaming at him.

"I'm practically an adult," he adds on, "I can make my own choices."

"Techno..." Phil sighs, "Techno that's- We've talked about this."

Techno huffs and looks firmly away. Phil knows he's putting up a wall, a defense, instead of agreeing.

Phil takes a breath.

"Okay," he says, "Can we- can I ask why you tried to visit her?"

Techno shifts on his feet and says nothing.

"Okay," Phil says again, still doing his best to remain calm even as his heart races after getting yelled at by his middle son. "Well I can't help you if you don't talk to me. Or communicate in some other way if you can't do that. And we agreed in therapy a while ago that if you tried to visit your mom, it would be considered a safety risk and that I would put into place rules that I felt were necessary."

Techno looks up, terror in his eyes as he stares at Phil's forehead. His hands clench together at his sides.

Phil hates putting down firm rules, he always feels like he's making a mistake, even when they're pre-agreed to boundaries.

"You're not allowed to leave the house by yourself for anything longer than two hours," Phil tells him, "You're not to open the mail. I'm going to be checking your phone daily. Do you understand?"

He's thought about these rules beforehand, knows they're necessary but he hates watching Techno light up in fury at the perceived unfairness.

“Do I understand, do I fucking understand?”

And Techno’s back to yelling. Phil takes a deep shaky breath and then tries for another. Techno continues to shout.

“No Phil, I don’t understand. She literally sent me two letters and now I’m not allowed to leave the house?”

Techno knows it's not that simple. Phil does his best to explain.

“You tried to take a bus-”

“I wasn’t going to!”

“Was that before or after I called you that you made that decision?”

Techno seethes and Phil knows they’re not getting anywhere. Techno’s not ready to have this conversation, and honestly, neither is Phil. His breath is shaky, uneven, and his hands tremble.

“If you want to discuss what I’ve set down, we can do that, but I’m not going to discuss this with you when you’re coming from a place of anger and hurt,” Phil adds.

Techno huffs and storms off down the hall his room is attached to, slamming the door shut behind him.

Phil watches his leave and wonders what he could have done differently.

Phil’s first girlfriend dumps him on a Tuesday. They were a college fling, hooking up at a party and then lasting into the following morning.

She was sweet, and caring, and Phil knows that he was lucky to have her. She was smart, funny, and sly. They bonded over anime and computers and Phil- she could be Phil’s soulmate.

He feels nothing when he kisses her, touches her, but he stays with her anyways. They’re meant to be. It makes sense.

She breaks up with him on a Tuesday, saying there isn't any spark between them. It’s been three weeks of dating, and Phil agrees.

Even though he's sad to see her go, wondering what he could have done differently.

Feel things, he supposes, but he doesn’t know quite how you do that.

Phil can’t feel his face. Or his hands, or his feet, and he isn’t sure about his elbows.

What he can feel is the music pounding through his entire body and the burn of alcohol on his throat. The second time Phil gets wasted is in college, and nowhere near as interesting as the

first time. The third time Phil gets wasted is the next day. The fourth time is two nights after that.

And then each time Phil gets drunk starts to blend together. For someone who hasn't drank a lot in his life, it takes a lot to get him drunk. Phil takes it as a challenge.

He goes hard for a week, then hard for a second when his friends start to notice. They urge him to lighten up, saying he has time and he does actually need to have a real meal and classes to go to, and you know be an adult.

So Phil lightens up. He only gets drunk on weekends. But even that starts bleeding into Fridays which then means pregaming on Thursdays and now- now only a few months after Phil gets drunk for his second time, he's drinking regularly.

He argues that it's fine, that it doesn't matter too much, that he's not even drunk that often.

Most days he's only buzzed at most. And come on, all of his friends get high and a lot of them consume energy drinks, how is this that different?

Even so, he avoids telling Sam about his habit and makes sure he's always sober going to his therapy sessions.

A part of him thinks it's probably bad that he's keeping secrets from his therapist, but another part of him says that Sam doesn't need to know everything, that Phil's life is his own.

He doesn't show up to therapy drunk.

Until he does.

Wilbur comes home from a high school party drunk exactly once and Phil almost has a near heart attack.

It's Techno that alerts him to what's going on.

He's in his room, ready for bed and reading before he turns the light off for good when there's a timid knock at his door.

"Yeah," he calls, "Come in."

The door creaks open slowly showing Techno on the other side. He gives Phil a soft look, meeting eyes for barely a quarter of a second before flicking his head in the direction of the hall.

Phil looks at him and frowns.

Techno makes the motion again.

"You want me to come with you?" Phil guesses.

Techno nods.

Phil sighs and gets up from his bed, ready to figure out whatever Techno needs from him.

Techno leads him down the hall and then down the stairs, silent all the while. Phil hasn't actually asked, but he's pretty sure Techno's nonverbal. He used to be nonverbal a fair amount when he was younger, but he barely ever has nonverbal episodes these days, and Phil admits the change has him a bit worried,

Techno being nonverbal doesn't mean that anything is wrong. Sometimes he still needs quiet days, and that's totally fine. If Techno needs quiet, Phil is more than willing to support and accommodate that.

But it's unusual these days, and it makes Phil wonder if anything else unusual is going on.

Moments later he sees Wilbur sitting on the couch, glass of water in front of him, head hung, smelling like cheap beer and- well cheap beer mostly.

"Oh," Phil says.

Wilbur's head jerks up and he catches sight of Phil before immediately turning to Techno.

"You told him?" his oldest hisses.

Techno looks at him, rolls his eyes, and then leaves them alone.

All of a sudden, it's Phil and Wilbur, alone in the living room.

"Are you drunk?" Phil eventually asks, even though the answer is pretty obvious.

"Yes," Wilbur says, "barely though."

Which Phil thinks is probably accurate. His words are clear even if his gaze does look a little off. Wilbur can't be that drunk. But he's drunk enough to be drunk.

Phil sighs.

"Drink the water," he encourages, "I'll make some food."

Wilbur looks up at him in surprise. Phil ignores it for now. They'll talk about this later- have a real talk and discuss why this isn't okay, but for now making sure Wilbur is okay and helping him sober up is his number one priority.

God he can't believe Wil did something this dumb.

Phil jumps off his roof when he's ten years old. And okay, it's dumb. He knows it is but he had pulled the old sofa that was stored in the garage out and it had looked like fun! He has neighbors who jumped from their roof into their pool, and this had to be similar, right?

Turns out, it was definitely not similar and Phil finds that out as a large crack comes from below him and a red hot pain shoots up his right foot and leg.

He screams out, and nothing happens. No one one comes.

Phil whimpers in pain and tries to move. He quickly regrets as another strike of pain flows through him and he lets out another yelp. Faintly, he recognizes he sounds like a wounded animal.

How pathetic.

He can't move so he lies there in pain and hopes someone will find him.

Thankfully, not too long later, his mom exits the house into the back- due to the noise he's caused he's sure- and takes one look at Phil lying on the ground, tears in his eyes in obvious pain.

"What did you do?" she demands.

"I fell," Phil admits through tears, even if more accurate is 'I jumped.'

She stares at him, unimpressed.

"I jumped off the roof," Phil admits, because she's obviously not going to help at all until he tells her.

If anything, she seems even less impressed with a deep frown and hands on her hips.

Phil looks back at her, leg stretched out in front of him. He looks at it again and notes the white part sticking out of his leg. He's pretty sure that's not supposed to be there.

"Did you learn your lesson?"

She still hasn't asked if Phil's okay. But maybe that makes sense considering he is so obviously not. Still it would have been nice.

It would have been even nicer for her to take him to a hospital. Phil's starting to feel pretty ill.

"Yes," Phil says, then sees his dad in the doorway. He corrects himself, "Yes ma'am."

She nods at him, shakes her head in a way he's pretty sure is supposed to be fond but really isn't. Then slowly and carefully she heaves him up and into her arms.

"Let's get you to a doctor," she says softly. Phil whines and buries his head into her neck. He doesn't really remember all of the details after that, just that he ended up getting a bright green cast on his leg. Clean break, easy to reset, but would take some time to heal.

Whenever Phil complained about the pain, his parents would always look at him in a way he knew meant that this was his own fault. He stopped complaining pretty quickly.

Tommy was his child who complained the most. He wasn't at first, that definitely went to Techno. but the more he got comfortable, the more he started complaining, and Phil took it as

a win.

On some level, it could be seen as rude, complaining, but Phil saw it as a blessing in disguise. It let him know when Tommy didn't like something. Tommy would often just shrug and go along with whatever, but the complaining was the first time Tommy ever let his boundaries be heard.

So that's how Phil treated it, Tommy setting boundaries.

He couldn't be more thankful for his youngest finally finding his voice, even if it was bitching over what they were having for dinner that night.

Phil's set his own boundaries with himself. One of his big ones is don't bring up the drinking with Sam. But inevitably he forgets about an appointment and scrambles to get ready, only showing up a minute late.

He hasn't had much to drink today, just two beers, but the smell lingers on his breath.

He was already late, he didn't have time to brush his teeth to disguise the smell.

It's Sam's first comment once they settle in.

"Are you late because you were drinking?" he asks.

It's not an attack, but a question. Phil knows it is. Even so, he bristles.

"No," he defends. It's true after all. The two events were completely unrelated.

Sam nods.

"Do you want to talk about it?" he asks, "I know you don't drink."

"I can drink," Phil defends, "I'm 21."

"I never said you couldn't," Sam agrees. They both know it's so much more than that.

"I'm an adult," Phil goes on, "I can make my own choices. I'm responsible. I've been living on my own for five years now and I have a job and do well in school."

Sam nods.

"How often have you been drinking?" Sam asks.

Phil deflates. He's fine- he's doing fine, so the number shouldn't be hard to admit. It's not a bad thing, it's not a problem, he's doing fine so...

So why doesn't he want to tell Sam?

It's in that moment that he realizes he needs to tell Sam.

"Pretty much every day," he admits.

Sam gives another nod.

“You once told me you never wanted to drink. That growing up with alcoholic parents taught you that. That it was a bad habit and consumed people’s lives in the worst ways, even those who were considered functioning.”

Phil had said that. It was something he still believed.

“It’s genetic,” he defends, “It’s- and I mean I’m not an alcoholic. But if I was... I mean there’s reasoning for it right, it makes sense. It’s genetic.”

“It can be,” Sam says then pauses, “Were your grandparents alcoholics?”

Phil nods. He’s sure he’s mentioned that to Sam before.

“Did your parents ever say that to you? That it was why they drank? That it was genetics? And that’s what made it okay? Did they justify their downfalls with that excuse?”

Phil’s heart pounds and his hands shake. Yeah, yeah they had before.

“It’s not why I drink,” Phil protests, “And I didn’t say it was okay. I-”

He thinks about, thinks about the past few weeks, months. It’s not- drinking isn’t even something he wants to do. It’s just... something he does. It’s part of his life, his routine and he doesn’t... he can’t stop.

It hasn’t even been that long yet and he can’t stop. He knows he can’t stop.

That scares him a little bit.

“I just... drink sometimes,” he says quietly.

Sam nods.

“I don’t want to be like my parents,” Phil admits, even more quietly.

Sam nods.

“I think you can drink and not be your parents,” Sam says, “And I think you can drink and be a lot like your parents.”

“I meant to do the first,” Phil confesses, “It was just... college. And having fun with friends but the next day they stopped and I kept going and then... and then I continued and I wasn’t getting drunk y’know, just buzzed but it was constant? And- and I’ve treated it like it’s not an issue? But the truth is I’m just turning into my parents. Because they weren’t violent or, or even always mean they were just, always drinking and... and it was enough that it... I don’t know... it wasn’t good? Y’know? And now I’m doing that same thing and I don’t know how to stop.”

Sam nods carefully, looking at Phil softly but without pity, meeting his eyes as his equal.

“Do you want to stop?”

If you asked him yesterday he'd have said no. Why stop doing something that wasn't bad for him?

Phil nods.

“Yes.”

“Okay,” Sam says. He leans back in his chair, relaxes, “Let's start there.”

Maybe Phil should have brought this to Sam a lot sooner.

Sometimes Phil really wished his kids told him things sooner.

Wilbur and Tommy were both awful at keeping secrets that it never really mattered. Even so there had been more than one time where they had been so obviously hiding something that made Phil wince in sympathy for their own terrible lying skills.

Ranboo was better at lying, but awful at sticking to a single story.

Tubbo was the best, but he wasn't actually Phil's kid and couldn't keep a secret from Tommy and Ranboo. And since neither of them could keep a secret... Well Phil always found out one way or another.

Techno was the only one who could really pull anything off.

But right now Phil was worried about Wil, because he was so obviously hiding something.

Tommy had already headed up to bed, a consequence of having school early the next morning.

Phil and Wil stayed in the living room, curled up on the couch.

Wilbur leaned against Phil, head on his chest even though he really was much too big to be doing that these days.

Phil strokes his eldest's hair gently, carefully working through the knots as they mindlessly watch the tv and whatever show is playing.

"What's going on with you?" Phil asks, "you're hiding something."

Phil doesn't have to see Wilbur's face to know how guilty he looks. He even shifts slightly in Phil's arms. Phil rolls his eyes at the obvious tell.

"What do you mean?" Wil asks, his voice a touch too high.

"You know you can tell me anything, right?" Phil says.

Wilbur nods.

"Yeah, I know," he promises. He then pauses for a moment, space enough for a small sigh and a couple seconds of pondering.

Wil shifts again. Phil does as well, trying to get in a slightly more comfortable position where Wilbur's elbow isn't stabbing into his stomach.

"I met a girl," he admits.

"Oh?" Phil says. His eyebrows raise at the remark. Really that hadn't been what he expected. He's never seen Wil show this much interest in a girl before. He's gone on dates, sure. Phil knows he's attracted to women.

But for Wil to be interested enough in a girl not to tell him... well she has to be something special.

Wil leans back enough to look up at Phil, his crooked goofy smile saying more than enough on the matter.

"Yeah," he admits, "her name is Sally. I- dad I love her."

Phil blinks and does his best not to startle. Wilbur's love is obvious and deep. Phil knows it is, and he doesn't want to react in a way that Wilbur would think he's questioning that. Even so, Phil is surprised. He's never seen Wilbur so gone before.

"That's amazing," he says, because it is. He's so happy for Wil.

Wilbur nods, a dopey grin still etched across his face.

"Thanks," he says, "I dunno I guess you just never talk about girls y'know? So I wasn't sure... I don't know... felt weird to bring it up."

Phil's hand stills in Wil's hair.

They've talked about a lot over the years Phil supposes. A lot a lot.

Girls have never been one of those topics.

Wilbur has a point, it's not something Phil had ever mentioned. To be honest, it wasn't something he had even thought about.

Is that weird? Not to think about dating at all? Sure Phil's not really into girls like most people are but everyone thinks about dating. Right?

Phil wonders if he made a grave mistake.

Both the dating thing but also not talking to his kids about dating. He talked to them about sex, about being safe, and he told them about crushes.

But they haven't ever really talked about dating.

"So yeah, she's really cool. And really sweet," Wil says.

Maybe Phil had made mistakes not talking about partners with his son's before but he's here now.

"Tell me more about her?" Phil asks.

Wil lights up and gets a sparkle in his eye. Phil smiles and leans back to listen.

Ranboo is a phenomenal listener as Phil is quick to learn, he's just a shit rememberer. It's not something that's his fault. It's just... part of Ranboo.

Memory loss, memory issues, a long term disability that he's adjusted to.

That doesn't make Phil any less furious when people act like it's something Ranboo can control.

"Ranboo tends to do pretty well in class," Ranboo's science teacher explains to the IEP team at their current meeting. Phil notes how she talks about Ranboo in the third person as if Ranboo isn't sitting three seats to the left of her. "That said, he seems to have a lot of trouble listening and paying attention. He ends up being careless on assignments because he's not listening in class."

Phil watches Ranboo's fists curl tightly around his legs at the comment. He wonders where Ranboo's marble trap has gone.

He digs through his own bag, wondering if he has one that had been left there by one of his kids.

He finds a fidget spinner instead. Better than nothing, even if Phil knows it's not one of Ranboo's favorite stim toys.

He passes it over to the boy.

Ranboo gives him a quick look, and takes it without a word. His hands duck back under the table quickly and not long after Phil hears the near silent whirl of the object.

"Thoughts Ranboo?" Ranboo's lead coordinator asks.

Phil knows Ranboo's not super fond of her. He had a different one for a few months but then she went on maternity leave, and Ranboo had always said her replacement was more condescending than helpful.

"I listen," Ranboo protests softly, "I- I try at least."

Phil had no doubts about that. Ranboo's so good at following and respecting boundaries at home, at helping out in the kitchen or with tending to the garden under direction that Phil can't see that being the issue.

"It's just- I forget," Ranboo admits, "sorry."

"You don't need to apologize," Phil says.

At the same time, Ranboo's science teacher speaks up.

"I get that school might not be super interesting for kids your age, but these are simple things that people don't forget. The only reason you wouldn't be grasping them is if you were paying attention."

Ranboo shrinks into his seat.

Phil's not about to let his son get treated that way.

"Ranboo has numerous cognitive disabilities," he reminds, "Those disabilities affect his recall ability, memorization, and memory in general. He can listen and give his full attention and engagement and still forget concepts. It's one of the reasons he has an IEP. he shouldn't be judged and expected to do things his disability obstructs him from doing. You're here to listen to his needs and accommodate them. Not the other way around."

Phil admits, his tone may have been a bit harsher then he intended, but at least he got his point across.

Ranboo's science teacher stares at him with a gaping open mouth and Phil looks to his side to see Ranboo give him a soft smile. Warmth spreads through Phil's entire body and he reaches out a hand to settle on Ranboo's knee.

He hopes Ranboo understands that he will always have Phil in his corner.

Phil understands that recovery isn't linear.

With everything going on in the household while Ranboo slots in and finds his place, Phil is struggling. He knows he is. It reminds him- well it reminds him of before he started therapy or when he refused to bring things up to Sam in fear that Sam would judge him or more accurately that phil would judge himself too harshly instead of taking the time to learn and move on.

He wonders if maybe he should nip this in the bud.

He knows recovery isn't linear.

He knows it's okay to struggle.

He's told his own kids that same thing so many times. Maybe it's his turn to take his own advice.

He picks up the phone and makes a call.

"Sam?" Phil says into his phone, "Hey- I don't know if you remember me. This is Phil Watson? I was wondering if you had any openings these days?"

Chapter End Notes

We'll pretend it's been about a week like normal instead of three. Here we are with chap 2. 66% done.

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

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at the end of things

Chapter Summary

Different words for the same person. Different meanings for different words for the same person. Funny how slight changes make all the difference.

Chapter Notes

CW: bad parenting, bullying, general shittiness of the foster system, alcoholism, AA, underage drinking, medication, mental health issues, auditory hallucinations,

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Phil first has the idea in a McDonald's at 2am. There's not much to go off of, just a bunch of tired grad students talking over burgers and fries. One of them mentions growing up in the foster system and how shit it was at times.

Phil asks a few questions, doing his best not to grill. But sue him, he's curious, especially when- well he relates to a lot of the experiences.

But he had parents. Maybe- probably- not good ones though.

How many kids end up in homes like that? Sure maybe they can get through, survive in, but aren't able to thrive in.

It's at that moment Phil decides he's going to foster.

But it takes a good while before getting there.

Driving to college takes a good while. The car is stifling and Phil hates every moment of it.

His dad's driving because his mom keeps breaking out in soft rounds of tears.

"I'm going to miss you so much," she professes, "you have to promise to visit."

Phil nods numbly. How weird that he's never seen his mom love him more than when he leaves?

Leaving is always the hard part and moving Techno in is one of the most heart wrenching days of his life.

It was easier with Wil who didn't live far away and still visited every weekend.

But Techno... Techno was all the way in California.

They had made the long drive out together, just the two of them, a little cross country road trip.

Techno's been silent, reflective, for most of the time. Slowly doing what he needs to adjust to the change.

Phil's helping move in the entire weekend. Slow and steady, no rush. Uni is supposed to be exciting, but it's also a big change and they'll take it one little step at a time. Techno moves in this weekend, and then he has an entire week before his roommate moves in. Time to adjust, to breathe.

"I'm excited," Techno announces when they cross the Bay Bridge.

Phil smiles at the acknowledgement.

"Are you excited honey?" Phil's mom asks.

Phil gives a firm nod, and the sticky face paint on him moves with it. It rubs against his skin and is fairly irritating, but he's Frankenstein so his face has to be green. Obviously.

It wouldn't be right without having his green face with stitch marks and a neck thing with bolts. He's gotta look like the real thing.

The sun's setting behind him and his mom pulls him over quickly to do last minute pictures.

"Mom," he complains, "I want to get candy."

"Phillip," she scolds and he huffs loudly but lets her coo over him for another few minutes.

Finally, finally she steps back.

"Okay," she tells him, "Have fun. Be back by 10:30, okay?"

Phil frowns.

"What?"

"10:30," she repeats, "no later."

"But I thought we were going trick or treating?" he asks.

There has to be- what does his mom mean? Isn't she coming with him?

She nods encouragingly.

"You're old enough to go by yourself, you're ten now. Double digits, remember? Go on now."

He frowns. He- well he could go on his own.

But he wants to go with his mom.

He doesn't want to go trick or treating by himself.

"But-" he says.

Her face hardens and Phil falls quiet. He's pushed it too far, he can already tell.

"Philip, if you want to go trick or treating, go. I have work to do. Either go or don't, it's up to you."

Phil looks down at his feet. They're a bit covered by his costume, tattered pants that partly cover more paint in the shape of stitches.

"Okay," he mutters, and he scurried off. He got a pillow case this year, because like his mom said he's a big kid now and he gets too much candy to fit in a tiny pail.

But- but it's a little scary walking alone. Sure there's lots of people and it's safe and it's fine and he's old enough to be by himself- it's just...

A dog barks off to his right, and he jumps, startled. He carries on.

He's about an hour in when the bigger kids notice him. They have to be at least three years older than him, and they tower above.

"Aw, is the baby alone?" one asks, mocking tone heavy and thick

Phil shrinks away.

"I'm old enough to trick or treat by myself," he protests.

One of the other boys laughs.

"How old are you... like eight?"

"I'm ten."

The one behind him shoves his shoulder as he moves in front of Phil. He pulls out his plastic pirate's sword and points it at Phil, tapping his chest firmly with it.

"Give us your candy," he says.

Phil frowns.

"No," he refuses, and he clutches his bag closer to himself.

"We weren't asking," the first says, and then the seconds darting forward and wrenching the bag from his hand.

“Hey,” Phil protests, but the pirate sword is still pressed against him. It’s made of plastic, but he knows if the boy tries to hit him with it, it’ll still hurt.

Before he even knows it, the sword is gone, the boys are gone.

And so is his candy.

Stupid teenagers. They’re too old to be trick or treating.

Phil’s angry. He’s not sad or going to cry like the little kids do when someone takes their candy. No, he’s pissed. He’s mad and he wants to scream and his chest hurts.

All he can think about is the fact that this would have never happened if his mom was here.

Those boys would never risk taking his candy if his mom was here.

But she isn’t here.

Phil grits his teeth and clenches his hands before beginning the walk home. He doesn't even want candy any more.

When Techno and Phil park on campus they first walk to the housing office to get Techno’s keys.

Techno’s looking around warily, completely silent with his headphones shoved over his ears.

He’s almost Phil’s height, not slouched but crunched up, hunched over, and ready to spring at any sign of danger.

He looks a little like a startled cat.

Phil gives a small chuckle at the thought. Techno turns his head just enough though he certainly doesn’t make eye contact, and Phil answers the unspoken question.

“You’re a little like a cat,” he says, “Like a startled, recently rescued, cat.”

Techno glares at him. Or more accurately, Techno glares at the floor.

“You rescued me years ago,” he grumbles.

And if that doesn’t just warm and break Phil’s heart simultaneously.

Techno seems to know that, gently pushing forward to grab the door handle that Phil is now blankly staring at. He pushes it open and gives a nod inside. Phil contemplates the offer and they move inside the office together.

It’s completely empty save for the one person at the desk, a perk of moving in a week early. Techno had emailed his coordinator with the disability programs and they had approved it all so it would be less overwhelming.

Next weekend- the weekend Techno was supposed to move in- would have been better for Phil. He was actually supposed to be in a meeting right now.

But it was Techno needed, and therefore what Techno got. Phil didn't even think before he called in to cancel.

They push forward to the person at the desk.

She's young and Phil knows she has to be a student, maybe she's an RA. Maybe she's even Techno's RA. If she is, hopefully she's nice.

"Hi," she greets them cheerfully, when they step up, "What can I help you with?"

Phil defers to Techno, who's at his side, unmoving. Or mostly unmoving. The drumming of his fingers against the pant leg can't be ignored. Phil knows it's an anxious stim.

Techno's looking around, mostly up at the ceiling. Phil follows his gaze, viewing a multitude of pipes. It's not a very nice ceiling.

It's then Techno gives him a soft tap, shoulder leaning into his side just a bit more than close proximity.

"Me?" Phil asks.

Techno nods. Phil steps forward.

"Hi," he greets, "We're trying to check in."

"This is so nice," Tommy whispers, leaping onto the bed. Checking into the hotel hadn't taken long and the entire time Tommy had been star-eyed. And that was just checking in!

Phil chuckles at his enthusiasm and sets down his suitcase by the desk. He takes a seat in the chair at the desk, swivelling slightly.

Tommy looks at him with wide eyes.

"Is that a swivel chair?" he asks, as if he doesn't have one in his own room back home, and then leaps for Phil.

Phil barely gets out an oomph before he has an overly tall teenager pushing him onto the floor and spinning wildly in circles.

"Oh my gosh what am I going to do with you?" Phil jokes.

"Too late no take backs," he cries, "You signed the legal papers, no giving me back now!"

Phil laughs at the absurdity, the high energy of it all, because if he doesn't laugh he'll cry. Tommy has so much energy and he's acting- he's acting... He's so excited and he's- he's being a kid.

Tommy's a goofball, a mess, overly loud and enthusiastic. But he's rarely a kid. He's surprisingly mature while also being a complete dumbass and he never really got a childhood and here he is spinning in a swivel chair excited to chill for a local vacation at a hotel.

At a hotel versus at home because Tommy's never stayed in a hotel and now with Techno and Wil moved out, Phil can give Tommy that little bit of extra attention he hasn't gotten lately.

"Can we order room service?" Tommy pipes up, still turning in circles.

"Sure bud," Phil says, even though he knows the food won't even be that good and they'll charge an arm and a leg for it. "We can order room service."

Eating fast food may not be the best way to decide if you want to foster children but... Okay yeah no Phil doesn't have a better explanation. He just... he needs to. He wants to.

"Sam, do you think I'm responsible enough to foster children?"

"Like real ones?"

Phil rolls his eyes.

"Yes. Real ones."

Sam shrugs.

"What do you think?"

Phil groans.

"You never give me a straight answer."

Sam shrugs.

"I want to," Phil says, "I- And I was reading last night and Sam did you know this if gay people were allowed to adopted we wouldn't have foster kids? There's enough parents but we... we don't let them adopt. And there's a lot of kids that get taken away from good families even when it's not right and more that get put back with families even though it's not right. And there's so many kids without homes, so many that run away from homes and even foster care and... And that's not right."

Sam nods.

"I went to help them," Phil says. He's sure, determined, This isn't just a desire, but a need, a driving force.

"Why?" Sam asks.

And if that doesn't leave Phil spinning, stranded, baffled?

Why?

Phil- Phil doesn't know why. It's just- he needs to.

"My parents," he says before he realizes what he's saying.

He chuckles.

It always comes back to his parents, doesn't it?

"My parents. I have to for them. Or in spite of them? I don't know if it's just- my parents weren't great. And my friend, well she was saying that a lot of foster kids don't have enough supplies and they get put in homes that care but don't have enough resources and really they just want a home, a family to love them and, and..." Phil sighs, stares directly at Sam.

"I know what it's like to want your family to love," Phil says.

Because he does. God did he try. His parents- they loved him sure but they never really loved Phil and Phil- Phil wants to give that to kids. Phil wants to give them unconditional love, show them that they belong. He wants to be that placeholder, that safe spot until they move on. Either they grow up, get adopted, or go back to their own families. It's- it seems a lot like being lost.

Phil was lost once. And he knows what it's like to want love.

If he can... if he can give even one kid a safe harbor...

Well that seems worth it.

When Phil was eleven, his parents took him to Disney World. It had been the best vacation of his life. It had been magical, joyful, full of wonder and adventure.

It had also been full of screaming, yelling, bitching, and complaining.

He doesn't like talking about that part of the vacation. It wasn't very vacation like at all.

He doesn't like talking about this whole drinking... thing. He's not exactly sure what to call. He's not- he doesn't think he's an alcoholic.

Probably.

Maybe.

Right?

But he goes to AA anyway. Because that's what you do. You drink alcohol too much, you go to Alcoholics Anonymous and then you stop (and then you relapse and you stop again and relapse, relapse, and relapse and god does anyone actually get better from shit like this?)

But Phil doesn't want to be his parents so he fucking goes.

He stops drinking. It's- it's easier than he thought it would be.

He thinks he's lucky.

There's a lot of guys there that look at him in awe when he says he stopped when he said he was going to stop.

He said he would stop and then didn't touch a drop.

For him, it was really that easy.

Phil doesn't really like AA. A lot of it's religious no matter how much they say it's not. And the steps work he guesses but they don't quite fit him and his sponsor- well his sponsor is a cool dude but he doesn't really seem to get Phil.

Sometimes Phil wonders if he's not trying enough in AA.

But then Phil remembers that he stopped drinking. Isn't that supposed to be the hard part? And that's the part he did.

He gets his year chip and then leaves.

AA doesn't help him.

Getting sober does.

If Phil fosters he has to keep sobriety. It's something he knows but it's also something that terrifies him. Because what if he can't do it?

It's Sam he brings his worries to.

"You've been sober for how many years?" Sam asks.

"Nine years," Phil says. It's an automatic response. A number he says he doesn't think about but always remembers. Always.

It's a reflex at this point, rattling off the numbers and dates to do with his drinking in seconds.

He knows it all.

"Exactly," Sam points out, "So why would it be an issue?"

Phil shrugs.

"You've come so far," Sam points out, "You brought me this desire, this half-assed plan seven years ago. Now you're getting your first inspection. Why now?"

"It's a lot more real now," Phil admits.

"What are you so scared of?"

Phil wants to help. Phil wants to help because he gets it and he's been there.

Phil wants to help- he does- and he thinks, he thinks he genuinely could. Not just a saviour complex. But really, really help.

But...

Well what if he makes it worse?

Phil makes a lot of mistakes. His biggest is with Ranboo.

He- Ranboo's autistic. Ranboo's autistic and all the signs were there and Techno knew after meeting him for less than five minutes and...

Phil has an autistic child and all three of his kids are neurodivergent.

How could he miss something like this?

It's one of his biggest faults, not knowing sooner, not offering the support to Ranboo sooner, not validating those parts of him sooner.

Ranboo stims, he's seen him stim he had just thought... well people stim. Lots of neurodivergent people do it more than average. Ranboo's neurodivergent.

And a lot... a lot Phil didn't even think about as autism symptoms just... part of Ranboo.

Ranboo's sensitive to light, okay turn the lights down. He startles at loud noises, he has anxiety and past trauma in addition to issues with dissociation, it makes sense. No loud noises around him.

He struggles with social cues and carrying his conversation so adjust, listen to him infodump because the kid was never taught social skills in the first place and it's not like there's anything wrong with infodumping anyway.

Texture aversions, lack of eye contact, meltdowns. Everything could be passed off as something else and Phil wasn't even looking at any of them as issues, didn't notice anything wrong, just wanted to support Ranboo.

He didn't go looking for a diagnosis, just adjusted the accommodations of the household to include and support Ranboo as well and suddenly all these symptoms were less disruptive because Ranboo was in a better environment and...

And Phil had never realized because it's hard to recognize the signs of autism when in an autism friendly environment.

It's so much easier for Phil to tell Techno's dealing with Autism Things TM (as he puts it himself, trademark and all) when there's things that are actually exacerbating those symptoms. Techno has more issues with his light sensitivities in brightly lit places with fluorescents. The house has Techno approved light bulbs and a complete lack of fluorescents. No wonder home is better.

No wonder there were things that Phil didn't notice.

Especially considering that Ranboo didn't want him knowing, that Ranboo had spent the entire time masking and trying to not have people know he was autistic.

God how many people had told Ranboo that being autistic was an issue?

Maybe not directly, since he hasn't been diagnosed, but all of his habits, all of the symptoms, everything that comes with autism.

All of this has Phil spiraling because god if he had known...

If he had known he could have validated Ranboo, made sure he felt love and accepted, that he knew his autism was a beautiful part of him.

But Phil hadn't done that.

And he felt like a failure.

That's when he first starts thinking about calling Sam.

Nothing like feeling like a pile of shit to get you back into therapy, huh?"

"Hey," Sam says when they first sit down. "Long time, no see. How's Techno? Wil?"

Sam knows him well enough that he won't talk about himself until he's talked about his kids. Even if it's been years.

"Good," he says, "It's been- they've been good. Uh. So have Tommy and Ranboo. And Tubbo. He's not actually mine but he's over often enough."

"Four now, huh?"

Phil nods.

"We'll have to talk about that," Sam promises.

Phil nods again.

Why does this feel so weird?

"And how are you?" Sam asks, "What's up with you?"

Phil blinks, gifts in his seat.

"I'm good," he says, "Life's good."

Sam raises an eyebrow.

"Then why call? If you're here to catch up- well it's been over three years Phil, you could have texted me as a friend, not a client. So cut the BS and let's get work done."

Ah, right. Now this is familiar.

Is it weird that the reminder causes Phil to smile? He chuckles.

“Yeah okay,” Phil agrees, and they get to work.

Phil never really talks about alcohol with his kids, besides the fact that it’s not allowed in the house. Sometimes he wonders if that was a bad choice.

No, that's not right.

He’s pretty sure that was a bad choice. It’s- Phil’s not perfect and it’s still hard for him to talk about. And then he doesn’t know if he’s talking about his parents or himself.

He wants to talk to his kids about it. Some day. If he can.

He never gets to it while they’re still in the house.

Wilbur drinks once he moves out, and never at home. He drinks underage, but at least he’s eighteen and- and Phil doesn’t know how to bring it up. But he doesn’t drink with the baby and Wil has his own therapist and it hasn’t been a problem, not once.

Sometimes Phil has to remind himself that people can drink and that doesn’t mean things have to spiral, that bad things happen, that it means something more.

Wilbur drinks sometimes.

Techno- to Phil’s knowledge Techno never has. And the night before Techno’s twenty first, Phil can’t get that picture out of his head of one of his middle children getting absolutely wasted.

It terrifies him in ways he’s still working on.

He picks up the phone.

It rings four times before he gets an answer.

“Hi Dad.”

“I drank too much in university,” Phil blurts out.

There’s shuffling from the line and Phil realizes what a bombshell he just dropped.

“I just, you’re turning 21 tomorrow and you’re an adult Techno I just- please be careful, okay? And you can always, always, always talk to me. About anything.”

More shuffling.

“I know,” Techno says softly.

“Okay,” Phil says, “I’m just making sure because I know we say it a lot and I know you know you can talk to me about anything but I like reassuring and-”

“Oh,” Techno says, “yeah I know that too.”

What?

Phil- what?

Phil doesn't get it.

“What?” he asks.

“I know you had issues with alcohol,” Techno says. “It's not really a secret.”

It's not?

“I've never talked about it?” Phil half-questions.

“I mean you kinda did,” Techno says, “maybe not directly. Maybe not a lot. I didn't know it was a college thing. But... yeah.”

“Oh.”

Techno had known?

“You keep your year chip in your bedside table,” Techno says, “Most parents keep lube.”

Phil splutters.

“Lube? Techno why were you looking for lube in my bed stand table?”

“I wasn't!” he protests, “Gross I was like- a kid. I'm just saying.”

“A kid? Wait, Techno, when did you find my year chip.”

Phil's been sober for two decades, but he only has the year chip. Never stuck around long enough to get more, and never found the month ones significant enough to keep around.

“I dunno, few months after I moved in with you? Max two years? Definitely before I was adopted. Don't remember if it was before or after you asked.”

That was... That was about a decade ago.

Techno's known about this for ten years?

Ten years.

“But I'll be safe, I promise,” Techno says, “I'm going to drink. More curiosity than anything. We'll see. I haven't had anything before. I have smoked- weed, not cigarettes. And we're not going to a bar. I'll be with friends- safe, good friends. You like Dream, right?”

“Yeah,” Phil manages. Dream's a good kid.

“And I don’t want to get drunk. It sounds- I mean, okay don’t be mad?”

Phil’s heart pounds. Why would he be mad? What is Techno doing? Is he okay?

“Techno?” he presses, more scared than anything else.

“I went off my meds.”

“Techno!”

“Not like that,” he promises, “I talked to my psychiatrist!”

“Why?”

Techno goes quiet.

Phil has a realization. And god he hopes he’s wrong. There’s no fucking way Techno would have. Right?

“Techno did you go off your meds just so you could drink on your 21st birthday.”

“If I say yes will you be mad?”

Phil- goddammit Phil doesn’t know.

“Okay, yes I did. But I went off safely and I’m starting them again in two days but I mean obviously no meds means more realistic and more often hallucinations which- I mean it hasn’t been great not gonna lie there is a reason I am going back on the meds in general. It’s been fine just a bit... yeah so I don’t think- I mean hallucinating and being drunk doesn’t sound like a good mix so I don’t really want to get drunk just kind of try alcohol but I know it mixes like... really bad with my meds so I went off them.”

Phil wants to scream. Phil wants to- Techno went off his meds just to fucking try alcohol? What was he thinking. He could- Fuck Phil thought he raised kids smarter than this.

“...Dad?”

Fuck. Phil did raise smart kids.

Because Techno wanted to do this and he’s an adult and he talked to his psychiatrist and weaned off his meds and is planning to take them again but knew he had to because the curiosity would stay and- and he did everything right but it’s so so fucking dumb.

“Okay,” Phil says, “I- okay.”

“...You’re not happy with me.”

“No, I’m not,” Phil agrees, “And I don’t know if it’s a parent thing or past experience thing.”

“Okay,” Techno says.

“Okay,” Phil says, “You’re an adult.”

“Yeah.”

“Be safe.”

“Always.”

God his kids are going to kill him.

“Thanks Dad,” Techno whispers, and then he hangs up the phone.

Phil sits there in stunned silence and takes a breath.

He replays the conversation in his head, again, and again, and again.

It’s a lot to consider. And then he remembers Techno’s words.

‘Thanks Dad.’

Phil doesn’t remember when each of his kids started calling him Dad. He did once, but he-okay ‘Dad’ doesn’t mean that much to him. Or it does it’s just-

Phil remembers when Techno first called him Phil without first calling him Mr. Phil. He remembers when Wilbur called him Philza, how Tommy had changed it to Dadza, and when Ranboo told him that he wasn’t his dad but probably the closest he’d ever get and how that was good enough for him.

Dad is still not a word that’s always uttered.

Dad is mixed in with Philza, with Dadza, with fuck you with Father with Mr. Phillip Watson with you dick with Tommy ticing back Phil’s own endearing ‘mate.’ His kids call him all sorts of names.

But Dad isn’t just a name, but a feeling and Phil, Phil is so much more than Dad.

It’s what works for them, and that’s what matters.

The truth is Phillip Watson had never gone by anything but Philip. And then all of a sudden, he only ever went by Phil. Now, to a few select individuals, he also gets to be ‘Dad.’

Chapter End Notes

And there we have it. full circle. now yall understand phil better.

now onto the next one...

The next Encompss story is about *drumroll pls* TECHNO

Techno fic details

- two week gap before first chapter as always
- not releasing the title yet
- we get to see and talk more abt technos parents
- return of technos college roommate: dream
- also ft. adhd, auditory hallucinations, and autism! Triple A!

~Cool Community Things to Check Out!~

Encompass Sandbox Project: The official guide to the Encompass Sandbox Project- a project in which users are encouraged to take inspiration from the encompass series and create their own varying works of fiction from writing, to art, and so much more.

encompass: the sandbox: encompass: the sandbox is the official collection for the Encompass Sandbox Project.

encompass: behind the scenes: an insider look at everything that goes on in the encompass series. This series will feature Q&A, projects, plans, and other behind the scenes content.

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